

No. 40.

Price One Penny.

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

STANFIELD HALL.

BY J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED AT THE "LONDON JOURNAL" OFFICE,
12 and 13, FETTER LANE.

All Back Numbers still on Sale.



[THE CORONATION OF ANNE BOLEYN.]

"Crush him," said Lady Rochfort, with a fiend-like look—"crush him ere he can use it ; set thy heel upon the serpent's head ere it can use its fangs to sting thee. Didst thou know the power," she continued, contemptuously, "women can exercise o'er those who love them, Henry would only hold the sceptre, thine the hand to sway it. Creation's lords are puppets in our hands ; we pull the strings and move them at our pleasure ; nature hath armed our weakness with a power to mould the masters of the world at will."

"But should my fears be right ?" urged Anne ; "should Henry see that fatal letter, farewell the thought of marriage."

"Better before than after," replied her shrewd confidante, with a terrible emphasis, which proved how thoroughly she understood the character of the king ; "better to temporise with fate than brave it. As for this speechmonger, this jester, this fellow whose weapons are his words, leave him to me ; if he possess the secret, I know a way to wring the knowledge from him."

"And the agent ?"

"Is a shrewd one," said the unprincipled woman, whose beauty was only equalled by her licentiousness.

"Enough ; he is one of those soft fools who set their lives upon a woman's smile,—things to be used, but laughed at. Trust to my friendship, and leave all to me."

"To thy ambition rather," murmured her sister-in-law, as her counsellor quitted the terrace to meet Sir John Norris, who had been wistfully eying her for some time from the sward beneath. "How eagerly the love-stricken minion spurns the dull earth as he advances ! Look to thy honour, Rochfort," she added, with a frown ; "for by my womanhood, yon galliard's face might win a woman's heart more guarded than thy wife's."

"How !" she exclaimed, suddenly assuming a haughtiness of manner to hide her confusion, as she saw the jester approach ; "our privacy broken in upon ! Have we spies upon our steps ?"

"Lady," he replied, and his voice was low and musical, as suited the earnestness of his purpose, "why should we be foes ? Smile not ; 'tis in my strength, not in weakness that I speak. The contest is unequal : thou art fair and young, with all youth's glorious dreams fresh in thy soul—with all its ties around thee ; I have passed alike the age of hope and promise. If it is sometimes hard to feel that earth hath not one link, there is at least this advantage—that death presents no terror. Why should we continue it ?"

"At what price ?" demanded Anne, who imagined she saw in the submission of the speaker a proof that neither he nor Wolsey dreamt of the existence of the fatal letter. "At what sacrifice are we to secure the friendship of so great a man as Patch the jester ? Think'st thou," she added, with a sneer, "a quip will efface our

image from the heart of Henry, or break a purpose kings have failed to shake?"

"No sacrifice," answered the singular being, his eye slightly kindling at the sarcastic manner in which she addressed him. "Since it will bring thee honour, be generous to a fallen foe."

"To Wolsey!" interrupted Anne Boleyn; "never! There is a hate between us which all thy cunning sophistry would fail to cure."

"Be content with his disgrace—his absence from the Court," urged the suitor in his still humble manner. "If he hath wronged thee," he continued, "his downfall hath atoned it. Why extort from Henry's lips a pledge for his destruction?"

"He is mine enemy."

"At least a noble one," said the jester, proudly; "for he will leave a trace upon the earth for men to ponder and to wonder at. The memories of such men fade not like idle dreams."

"His dreams will soon end!" exclaimed the now reassured Anne triumphantly. "This very night Henry hath promised to sign the order for his impeachment and committal to the Tower."

"Were it already signed," said Patch, coolly, "I should not fear; he hath a powerful friend to plead for him; one whose favour with the king is paramount against all other influence."

"Whose?" demanded his astonished listener.

"Yours," whispered the jester; "judge if I overrate it; the king will not resist your sighs and tears; for, if needs must, you shall both lie and kneel, and feign and pray to shake him. It will make Satan laugh," he added in the same undertone, "to see the perjured hypocrite fawn on the man she loathes, to win the safety of the one she hates; to undo the mesh her cunning heart devised; bribing her royal dupe with a kiss, false as the one which sealed her faith to Wyat, or transferred it, a short hour after, to the amorous king. I would have spared thy woman's shame," he continued; "but thou hast forced this from me. Hadst thou been true to nature, to thy sex—had one generous impulse, one spark of Eden, lingered in thy soul, I would have spared this last humiliation. Remember the blow aimed by thy malice must be stayed, or it will crush thee with thine enemy."

"I am lost," sighed the overwhelmed woman, who so lately deemed herself a queen.

"Not lost, but warned. One step further against thy fallen foe, and thy letter to Wyat—the one which paints thy loathing of the king and thy warm love to his more youthful rival is placed in Henry's hand. Knit thy fair brow," he added, "and act the puppet-queen; "mock at me; scorn me in public as thou wilt; but mark my will in this. I am one of those who warn not twice."

Bowing low, in mock humility, before her, that those who from a distance had marked their interview might not suspect the

singular tone in which it had been conducted, the jester took his leave, and continued his walk upon the terrace, satisfied that the danger which threatened the man he so faithfully served and loved, at least for the present hour, had been avoided.

When Lady Rochfort returned to her sister-in-law, after her interview with Sir John Norris, she found her pale as marble, seated upon a bench which fortunately happened to be near, and into which she sank as soon as the horrible interview between her and Patch was ended.

“Anne!” exclaimed the alarmed confidante, “in the name of every saint, tell me what has happened.”

“Mine enemy hath found me,” sobbed her relative, sinking upon her shoulder. “The jester has my letter, and threatened to lay it before the king. I am lost!” she added, passionately. “Why did I ever listen to the whisperings of ambition, or break the only vow my heart e'er sanctioned?”

“Threatened!” repeated Lady Rochfort; “if he hath only threatened, we may defy him. Rouse thyself,” she continued, loosening at the same time a golden flacon of perfumes which hung suspended by a chain from her jewelled girdle, and applying the contents to the brow and nostrils of her kinswoman. “Be but as true to thyself as I will prove to thee, and, despite the jester and his proofs, all will yet go well.”

The speaker, as our readers doubtless already have perceived, was a woman of resolution. She kept her word. During the month which followed the interview between Anne Boleyn and the jester, the oldest courtiers were mystified by the proceedings of the king towards his former favourite. It is true that Hales, the attorney-general, filed an information against Wolsey for having procured and published bulls from Rome securing the office of legate contrary to a law passed in the reign of Richard II., to which indictment the cardinal pleaded guilty, but professed ignorance of the statute, and submitted himself to the king's mercy, who not only granted him protection and pardon, but restored to him a portion of his forfeited wealth, amounting to six thousand three hundred and seventy-four pounds—a large sum in those days, and finally restored him to the sees of York and Winchester, from which he had been suspended.

All this was gall and wormwood to the future queen, who found herself compelled to use her interest and blandishments to secure the safety of the man she hated, and whom, whether justly or not, she considered her bitterest enemy. Patch, when he pleased, was an inexorable task-master, and amply avenged her broken faith to Wyat, who at her express instigation had been sent into a kind of honourable exile, under pretence of a mission to the Court of France.

This gleam of sunshine was the last doomed to fall upon the fortunes of the illustrious man whose name, with all his failings,

pride, ambition, and despotism, must ever fill a brilliant page in English annals. The tutelary genius and protector of the fallen minister suddenly disappeared from Court; vain were all the inquiries which Henry set on foot to trace him—Patch was nowhere to be found, and the enemies of his master once more raised their heads. But while Wolsey was receiving proofs of respect and popularity from the people, which he had never obtained in the days of his too brilliant greatness, his foes were more than ever impressed with the necessity of destroying a man who could render himself thus powerful even in adversity. Reports were conveyed to Henry's ears of the state and hospitality which his degraded favourite still maintained, and these accounts were exaggerated in order to impress the mind of the jealous king with the danger of suffering so ambitious and unsubdued a character to exercise so great an influence in society.

Unfortunately, there were circumstances innocent enough in themselves which seemed to favour these representations.

Wolsey was at Cawood Castle when the sudden arrival of the Earl of Northumberland was announced. He foresaw his fate, and prepared to meet it with dignity. He received his unwelcome guest with courtly hospitality, and conducted him to his own chamber, that he might change his apparel. There it was, according to Cavendish, who, as gentleman usher, alone was present, that the arrest was made. The captor laid his hand upon the cardinal's arm, and in a voice broken by emotion faltered out :

“ My lord, I arrest you of high treason ! ”

The keys of the castle were given up, and consternation spread throughout the household.

On the following morning Northumberland, after arranging everything according to his instructions, despatched Dr. Augustine, Wolsey's chaplain, bound like a common felon, to London, and prepared to set forward himself with his illustrious prisoner; but, as the cardinal had chosen to celebrate Mass for the last time before his household, it was late before the procession set out. At the gates of the castle it was joined by a number of country gentlemen, whom Northumberland had summoned to attend on the occasion, and more than three thousand persons were assembled, who expressed their good-will and commiseration to the unfortunate captive by crying out :

“ God save your grace ! Evil take them who have taken you ! ”

These and similar cries followed the train of the earl through the town of Cawood, where Wolsey had endeared himself to the poor and rich by his hospitality and charity.

As the prisoner progressed towards London, his strength was observed visibly to decline; and, by the time he reached Leicester, he was so exhausted that his attendants were obliged to lift him from his mule at the gate of the great monastery where they halted.

"Father abbot," exclaimed the dying man to the superior, who, at the head of his monks, had advanced to the gates to receive him, "I am come to lay my bones amongst you."

The speaker was too exhausted to utter more, but on being supported to his chamber, retired to his couch, whence he never rose again.

The first care of his eminence was to confess himself to an aged monk, whose reputation for sanctity was deservedly spread over the country round. What passed at that awful interview can never be disclosed till priest and penitent both stand before the judgment seat of the Most High, and the secrets of all hearts are known. Certain it is that the absolving words were at last pronounced by the aged minister, whose power, according to the faith of the Catholic world, unseals the gates of Paradise to man.

It was midnight. Northumberland and Kingston, the keeper of the Tower, stood conversing by the watch-fire, when they were startled by a violent knocking at the great gate. No sooner was the gate unbarred than a man, wrapped in a horseman's cloak, dashed through it.

"Am I too late, my lord?" exclaimed the intruder, addressing the earl, to whom he was well known, the former having held, when Lord Henry Percy, an office in the household of the cardinal—"have treason and cruelty accomplished their work? Is the proudest heart, the noblest mind in England yet extinct?"

"Patch," said the young noble, recognising him, "whence come you?"

"From the grave," continued the jester; "from the living tomb to which my enemies consigned me. But tell me," he added, "does our master, friend, still live?"

"The hand of death is on him."

"Too late—too late," murmured the faithful confidant; "but he must not die and dream that I betrayed him. His great heart must not descend into the tomb ere it hath done me justice. My lord," he added, "by our hours of old companionship—by a poor man's honour and a true man's faith—by your own generous nature, grant me one boon—let me behold my master ere he dies."

There was something so energetic in the jester's tone and face that Northumberland could not resist it; he knew his captive's dissolution was hourly, if not momentarily, expected; and he considered that he should run small risk in granting so poor a boon. Motioning to the speaker to follow him, he led the way to the interior of the monastery to the abbot's chamber, where the once powerful Wolsey lay in the agonies of his last hour.

On a low covered couch was stretched the emaciated form of the once powerful man; his full features so fallen and emaciated that even Patch recognised him with difficulty. The priests, who had just administered the last office of the Church, were slowly quitting

the cell when the jester entered it. Kneeling on a cushion at the foot of the pallet, he gazed for a few moments in silence upon the melancholy wreck of so much intelligence and ambition.

The dying cardinal was the first to speak. Fixing his hollow eyes upon his former favourite, he faintly smiled, and pronounced the name of "Patch."

The tone and look all spoke unbroken confidence and trust ; the kneeling man required no further assurance that Wolsey, even to the last, had rightly judged him.

"We have escaped them," murmured the sufferer ; "Rome's purple hath not been sullied in our person ; the curs who yelp to lap our blood are disappointed, Patch ; but, oh ! at what a price ! "

Here some internal spasm so fearfully wrung the dying man that he was incapable of uttering more.

"I, too, have suffered," whispered the jester ; "prison, torture, all that cruelty could devise ; but I am free again,—if not to save, at least avenge thee."

"I deemed thee dead," faltered Wolsey, "but never faithless. Who was thine enemy ? "

"Anne Boleyn."

The name seemed to rouse the wrath and latent energies of the expiring man. "Anne Boleyn !" he exclaimed, "the destroyer ! Ere long her beauty shall be quenched in blood. The crown she seeks shall crush her. See !" he added, pointing with his emaciated hand to some imaginary scene before him, "the scaffold rears its hideous front. Another and another still succeeds. Blood ! Henry will slake his thirst in the hot stream. Does he think our thunders sleep, or that Rome's arm is nerveless ? Summon a council of the church—unveil the dread artillery of Heaven. Heresy descends like Egypt's plague upon the land—England is lost—the rock of faith split with dissension—the rein escapes me. Martyrs and saints, *ora, ora, pro nobis !*"

With this invocation on his lips, the haughty spirit passed away from earth, and Wolsey lay beyond the reach of human malice or of human sympathy.

No sooner was the last struggle over than Patch approached the side of the couch, and kissed the dead man's hand—a burning tear fell upon it as he did so. Amongst the jewelled rings which glittered on the nerveless fingers was the poisoned one, which had been his own gift. He slowly drew it off, and touched the secret spring.

As he suspected, it was empty.

"Pale corpse," he murmured, extending his hand towards the body, "thou shalt be avenged—I swear it by our compact and our sufferings ! "

Could Anne Boleyn, Rochfort, and Norris have heard his words, they might have trembled at the jester's oath.

CHAPTER XV.

Ambition first sprung from your blest abodes,
The glorious fault of angels and of gods ;
Thence to their images on earth it flows,
And in the breasts of kings and heroes glows.
Most souls, 'tis true, peep forth but once an age,
Dull, sullen prisoners in the body's cage ;
Like Eastern kings a lazy state they keep,
And undisturbed in their own palace sleep.—POPE.

THE night after Wolsey's death, all that remained of the once powerful favourite was consigned to its final resting-place, in the chapel of Leicester Abbey, by torch-light, with all the ceremonies due to his ecclesiastical dignities ; but previous to this solemnity it was thought proper that the mayor and aldermen of the town should see the body, in order to prevent any false rumour respecting his death. On inspection, it was found that Wolsey had constantly worn a hair shirt next his skin—a mark of penitence which none of his attendants suspected his having adopted. It is not specified by Cavendish, his gentleman usher, who was faithful to him to the last, that any appearances of poison were observed upon the body ; and although several contemporary writers repeat the assertion that the cardinal poisoned himself, the fact of his having done so must always remain an historical doubt.

A hundred torches lit the chapel in which the remains of the once haughty cardinal were being lowered to the grave. Twelve knights held the ropes upon which the coffin, adorned with the mitre, crosier, and hat, was supported ; and as it slowly descended, the flashing of the tapers upon their bright steel armour contrasted finely with the sombre vestments of the abbots and monks, grouped around, and chanting a *de profundis* for the dead. Bareheaded, at the foot of the grave, stood the Earl of Northumberland, and Sir William Kingston, the Keeper of the Tower, opposite him ; both most probably reflecting on the instability of human grandeur and human wisdom. The former, while Lord Henry Percy, had been an officer of the dead man's household, and could judge better than most of the virtues and weaknesses of his late prisoner, whose conduct in dissolving his hasty contract with Anne Boleyn he had long ceased to resent, nay, even felt grateful for.

But where was Patch all the while,—the inimitable Patch—the melancholy jester—the kind cynic—the man whose gall was in his tongue alone, for the rich milk of human love left it no room within his generous heart ? Far from the pomp of death, from the official grief of those around him, the last true friend of fallen greatness knelt in a retired corner of the chapel, anxious to veil his tears from every eye. Vainly the jester tried to pray ; his attention at every word was broken by old memories, and passages

of former kindness, confidence, and faith, between him and the master who had called him friend, and by that word restored him to his own respect, and which he had repaid by services such as no gold could purchase.

Just as the service was concluded, a violent ringing at the great gate startled the assistants. The earl gravely whispered something to one of his attendants, who left the chapel, and returned with a packet, which he delivered into his master's hand, who, thinking probably that it contained some fresh instructions from Henry, hastily broke the seal and perused its contents.

"Marchmont," he said, to an esquire who stood near him, as soon as he had finished it, "go to the gate, give the bearer of this missive four crowns, and direct him to the town. On your life, neither draw bolt nor bar; and, above all," he added, in a low whisper, "not a word of the jester being here."

The young man bowed, and withdrew upon his errand.

The ceremony was completed, and one by one the knights and attendant priests withdrew from the chapel, leaving only the massive lamp which hung before the altar of Our Lady to give light to the interior. Of the many lately assembled there, Patch and the earl alone remained; the latter advanced to the remote corner where the jester was kneeling, and laying a friendly hand upon his shoulder, commanded him to rise: the mourner obeyed him without a word.

"I have received orders, which I dare not openly disobey, to arrest you."

"From Anne Boleyn," said Patch, quietly; "I guessed as much when I heard of the arrival of a messenger; she plays a bold game, but will lose at last."

"You think so?"

"I am sure so."

"Patch," said the earl, "thou hast a kind heart, and that head of thine, which is stuffed with something more than whims and crotchetts, has guided me from many a boyish folly. Twelve hours' grace is all I dare venture for thee; take the best horse in my stable, and my purse if thou hast need of it—put what space you can between us, and for thy safety and my honour, until better times, cross my path no more."

"You shall not tamper, my dear lord, with honour or with safety for my sake; perform your duty," replied the jester.

"What, arrest you?"

"Even so."

"Art mad, or tired of life—that, like an idle thing, you cast it from you?"

"My life, my lord, is as safe as your own. I have a powerful protectress in Anne Boleyn."

"Why, man," exclaimed the earl, "this is the excess of wilful-

ness ; blindness that will not see. I tell thee that it is by the request of her thou namest I am commanded to arrest thee."

"And I reply," answered Patch, in the same earnest tone, "that I possess the means to work my safety : nay, make mine enemy the step to reach it. Therefore, my lord, send me with Marchmont and the messenger."

"One moment," said the friendly noble, "and I have done. Approach, for the words I am about to utter bear death even in their echo to the unguarded speaker, and may prove scarcely less fatal to him that listens to them : Henry and Anne are married."

The jester received the intelligence with a gleam of satisfaction. It assured him that vengeance was within his power. He cast a look upon the unclosed grave, and his heart felt strengthened. "Still, my lord, I repeat my words ; perform your duty."

"Be it so," replied Northumberland, reluctantly advancing to the door of the chapel, and calling for his esquire Marchmont, to whom he pointed out the person of Patch, and pronounced the simple words "Arrest him. Blame not me, should Fortune have deceived thee."

With these words the speaker quitted the spot, in order to give directions for the departure of the prisoner, who resumed his former attitude of prayer or mediation for the dead.

The exact date of Anne Boleyn's marriage with Henry VIII. is uncertain. Hall, whose accuracy in dates is remarkable, fixes it on the 14th November, 1532 ; Stowe, on the feast of St. Paul, 25th of January, 1533. The truth appears to be that the ceremony was performed with so much privacy that it was only from conjecture that any specific date was subsequently assigned. The most decisive evidence upon the point is given by Cranmer, who in a letter to Hawkins, ambassador at the Imperial Court, mentions that the ceremony was performed somewhere about St. Paul's day. The divine selected to perform the marriage was Roland Lee, who was soon after promoted to the bishopric of Chester as a reward for his complaisance. At an early hour, according to an old manuscript account of the divorce presented to Queen Mary, Lee was commanded to repair to a garret at the western extremity of Whitehall Palace, and in that apartment the bond which afterwards proved so fatal to two of the parties present—namely, Anne and Sir Henry Norris, was secured ; the latter, with Ann Savage, afterwards Lady Berkeley, were the only witnesses of the ill-fated union, which was not publicly announced till the ensuing Easter.

The unacknowledged queen was seated in a luxurious apartment in Hampton Court, for although not openly recognised as queen, it was generally whispered at Court that the marriage had really taken place, and the rumour was confirmed not only by the respect and tenderness with which the king treated her, but by the state which in private she hesitated not to assume. Lady Rochfort and

Lady Rivers were standing behind her chair, half familiarly and half respectfully conversing with her, whilst a sober, acute-looking man displayed a portrait, which he had just completed, for her approbation. The painter was the Fleming Holbein ; the portrait was her own.

"It is like, very like," exclaimed the thoughtless woman ; "and yet methinks, Master Holbein, you might have done more justice to our poor merits. Painting should be something more than a dry copy of nature, a dry detail of beauties and defects ; it should cast its broad lights upon perfections only, and veil defect beneath its friendly shades. Was it necessary to be so very truthful ?"

Anne alluded to the slight deformity in one of her hands, which the truthful artist had given in the portrait. Some chroniclers describe this to have been an additional thumb, others as a bony excrescence merely, which protruded from the second joint.

The Fleming bowed, and observed, as he removed the picture from the easel, that the error should be remedied ; gallantly adding, that the defect, like the spots upon the sun, was the only thing which enabled men to contemplate the splendour of her beauty.

"He has mistaken his vocation," whispered Lady Rochfort, as the artist withdrew ; "he should have been a courtier, not a painter."

The portrait was the celebrated one, known, doubtless, by the engraving, to most of our readers, in which the second wife of Henry is represented with her hands somewhat demurely folded over her jewelled stomacher.

At this moment Sir Henry Norris entered the apartment. Anne blushed at the look of open admiration with which he regarded her, and which caused her sister-in-law and Lady Rivers to exchange significant glances.

"Speak !" she exclaimed, starting from her seat ; "are our orders obeyed—is the traitor found ?"

"He is, most gracious madam," replied the knight, with an affectation of respect.

"And a prisoner ?"

"Safe in the strong chamber of Wolsey's tower," he replied.

A smile of triumph lit the countenance of the questioner, to whom the imprisonment or death of Patch was an object of the utmost moment, as touching her future safety. The expression gradually changed to one which destroyed its beauty, for it denoted cruelty.

With an impatient wave of the hand she motioned Lady Rivers from the apartment, and remained alone with the confidants of her danger and her weakness. For several minutes she paced up and down, her resolution struggling with her better nature ; then suddenly stopped, and with her tiny foot beat impatiently the inlaid floor.

"This is folly, Anne," whispered her sister-in-law; "what you decide must be decided quickly."

"Better a thousand lives be sacrificed," added Sir Henry Norris, "than one unquiet thought should e'er disturb the security of your repose."

"I know," answered Anne Boleyn, hurriedly, "I know that he must die, for not till he is in the grave can I believe myself a queen; my own safety and the fortunes of all who love me depend upon his silence."

"Be resolute," said Lady Rochfort; "you will sleep securely when you know that your enemy sleeps his last sleep on earth. Had the fool resigned the letter he might have lived in dull obscurity; his obstinacy falls on his own head."

"Were every means employed," demanded Anne, whose naturally timid nature shrank at the thought of bloodshed, "to wring it from him?"

"Ay," said the knight, "and some sharp ones, too; if senseless stones had memory or tongue, Hever Castle could tell a tale of groans and sufferings might blanch the cheek to hear. But he was firm; threats passed him like the wind; his resolution, like his chains, was iron; how he found strength to escape after he had bribed his gaolers, baffles my wisdom."

"Is there no other way?" exclaimed the hesitating queen.

"Perhaps," said Sir Henry, "for he hath demanded to see you; indeed, I am partly bound that you shall grant him audience, for Marchmont, who delivered him into my hands, refused to do so till I had pledged my knightly word he should have speech with you. Such, he said, were Northumberland's commands."

"Northumberland!" repeated Anne, still further unnerved by the mention of her former lover; "this must be met at once. I'll visit him."

On mounting the narrow staircase which led to the strong chamber over the archway, the queen and her attendants found the outward room guarded by six ruffian-looking fellows, who had, from their reckless appearance, evidently long been at odds with fortune. Not wishing to be seen by these men, she whispered to Norris and his companion to remain whilst she tried her eloquence upon the prisoner, whom she vainly thought to bend or influence to confess where he had hidden the fatal letter, the possession of which was so necessary to her peace.

On entering the room which served as his temporary prison, she found him calmly seated at the grated window, watching the various constellations, which, like gems upon night's mantle, sparkled in the heavens. So absorbed was the jester in his occupation, that either he heard not the fairy footfall in the chamber, or did not choose to notice it. Patch's conduct was a puzzle sometimes to himself.

"So, jester, we meet again," she exclaimed, removing her mask, and fixing her piercing eyes upon him. "Thou hast not forgotten me?"

The captive rose, and stripping up the sleeve of his doublet, slowly bared his arm, displaying the shrivelled muscles and half-healed scars, which proved how fearfully the torturers had accomplished their task. His visitor shuddered as she gazed upon the mute accusation of her cruelty and vengeance.

"Forget you, lady?" he replied, in a calm, passionless voice. "The miser forgets not his debtor; and though I bide my time, the hour for payment is but deferred—not past."

"Payment?" faltered Anne, attempting to hide beneath a smile the secret terror which his words had occasioned. "A look, a sign from me, and every debt is cancelled. There are those without will strike a balance 'twixt us."

"Doubtless," said the jester—"those who deal in perjury seldom hesitate at murder."

"Be advised," continued the fair speaker, regardless of the interruption, "and resign this proof of my girlhood's folly. Do this, and not only will I forget the past, but recompense, by future bounties, the ills thou hast suffered from thy misplaced firmness—load thee with wealth and honours. For know," she added, "we have reached a height which sets all foes at nought."

"True," said Patch, eying her sarcastically—"thou art married."

Anne Boleyn bowed her head in token of assent.

"And that same act," continued the speaker, "which gave a sceptre to thy hand, placed an axe in mine."

"An axe!" iterated the new-made queen, gazing upon him in surprise not unmixed with terror.

"Thou hast a dainty foot to tread the blood-stained scaffold's creaking planks—a slender neck to meet the headsman's office. For know," he added, "that ere to-morrow's sun reaches the mid-arch of heaven, a sure hand will place thy letter before thy jealous husband's eyes. Henry will read thy vows of love to the deceived and exiled Wyat—the written proofs of thy distaste of him, scorn of his person, loathing of his passion."

"Mercy!" exclaimed the terrified queen, clasping her hands in agony; "Henry will divorce me."

"Divorce!" repeated Patch, with a laugh which might have thrilled a stouter heart than Anne's; "no, lady—no; Henry will not divorce you. With Katherine of Arragon—the daughter of a king, the niece of an emperor, the unspotted mother of his child—such tedious process might be necessary; but with the woman who has sold herself for the mockery of a Crown—the woman who has deceived him—wounded his pride, vanity, and self-love—his subject born—there is a shorter way—the axe—the axe!"

Although outwardly unexcited, the last words escaped from

between the speaker's clenched teeth with the vehemence of a serpent's hiss. His late triumphant foe was completely crushed.

At this moment Sir Henry Norris and Lady Rochfort, who had overheard every word of the conversation, entered the chamber, to the terrified queen's relief.

"Fear him not, Anne!" exclaimed the latter, whose courage was of the same masculine character as her mind; "fear him not! 'Tis but a tale invented by the braggart to purchase his vile safety."

Patch listened to her bold assertion with his usual quiet smile, and calmly advancing to one of the corners of the room, touched a spring concealed within the richly carved mouldings of the wainscot, which opening discovered a secret staircase artfully formed in one of the angular turrets of the gateway, which communicated with a passage leading far beyond the palace; it had been originally contrived by Wolsey when he built Hampton Court, for what purpose it is not now necessary to inquire. Like all his master's secrets, the jester was well acquainted with it.

"You see," he said, "how much I value life, when, for three hours past, escape has been within my reach,—nay, wooing me to tread the path of safety. Judge now how much I fear you."

He withdrew his hand as he spoke; the panel fell into its proper place. Incredulity itself could no longer resist so convincing a proof of his sincerity. Anne and her companions gazed upon each other in hopeless, dark despair. To contend with such a being seemed like a struggle against destiny itself; even the haughty spirit of Lady Rochfort quailed before him.

"Be merciful!" exclaimed the agitated queen, clasping her hands, and fixing a terrified, imploring glance upon him.

"Merciful!" iterated the jester with a laugh; "the woman whose mind even now was bent on murder can prate of mercy! No," he added, sternly, "not for my own wrongs and sufferings, but for your victim's fate, whose heart you broke, whose great soul you crushed, o'er whose untimely grave I breathed an oath of vengeance. I leave thee to thy fate—to Henry's mercy—to thy deceived husband's justice."

"For the sake of my unborn child!" gasped the suppliant.

The jester started. Then, after a pause:

"For thy child's sake be it so," he said; "that is a plea might stay the avenging angel's sword. For one year from this day thou art safe—count every minute of thy greatness—sate thy soul with the false glare of pomp—but when the year is past," he added, "expect me here again!"

"An it prove a boy," whispered Lady Rochfort to her sister-in-law, "thou mayst defy him. The passion of Henry's life has been to have a son. Remorseless as he has proved himself, he will never sacrifice the mother of his heir."

A slight pressure of the hand was the only answer the reassured queen had strength to give.

"And now," resumed the jester, "I must away, if I am to keep the promise pity for thy child extorted from me. I already fear," he added, once more regarding the heavens, "that it may prove too late."

"Fly!" exclaimed Anne, rousing herself from the stupor into which the agitation of the interview had thrown her; "away at once! Trifle not with my life as well as thine!"

The jester once more opened the secret panel, and pointing to one of the torches fixed in an iron sconce against the wall, bade the queen remove it.

"For what?" demanded Sir Henry Norris, with a look of astonishment.

"To light me through the passages," answered the singular being, with a laugh which echoed through the chamber; "ha! ha! the Queen of England performs a menial's office for the jester!"

"Never," exclaimed the indignant Lady Rochfort, "never shall her majesty stoop to such humiliation."

"She has stooped to vice," coolly answered Patch, once more seating himself upon the oaken settle by the window; "can she descend much lower? But be it at her pleasure; *I am in no hurry to depart.*"

"It is useless," uttered the terrified Anne, conquering with a violent effort her pride and shame, "to struggle with my fate; I am ready to attend him."

Grasping the torch in her delicate hand, she advanced towards the opening, ready to descend as soon as he should give the signal. The jester gazed upon her agitated features and heaving heart for a few moments in silence.

Despite his sufferings, and scorn of her duplicity, the better feelings of his nature prevailed, and he resolved to spare her this last humiliation.

"Lady," he said, removing at the same time the torch from her trembling hand, "the lesson is complete. I will not tax thy feeble strength. Thou now must feel there is a dignity which Crowns cannot bestow, or tyranny destroy—the dignity of virtue. Farewell! Use the time wisely; the year will soon be past; when, true as the gnomon to the hour, we meet again."

With these last fearful words, which showed that his purpose was unchanged, the speaker disappeared, closing the secret entrance after him, and leaving the inmates of the chamber in consternation too deep to be described, too terrible for words. The knight was the first to speak.

"This is no man," he exclaimed; "a thing of heart, of thews and sinews, of warm flesh and blood; but a cold, sneering devil. We have been tricked," he added, "by a braggart's boast. Curse

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